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Course IV - Geostrategic Context

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RECOMMENDATIONS ON U.S. POLICY TOWARD NATO

INTRODUCTION

Events of the past four years have challenged the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in ways that the alliance has never experienced in its forty-four year history. Senior NATO decision makers are struggling to devise policies, strategies, and force designs to cope with "...changes of biblical proportion..." which "...have come to Europe at space age speed...."¹ Indeed, there is a substantial body of thought which questions whether the United States should remain in NATO, or even whether there should be a NATO at all. The purpose of this paper is to consider the future of the Alliance, and the role U.S. forces should have in the NATO of the future.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The NATO Alliance is a viable entity, essential to the security of the United States and its Western European Allies. It will remain so for the foreseeable future. The U.S. should remain a part of the Alliance, and retain sufficient forces on the continent to maintain a credible voice in trans-Atlantic security affairs; a Corps structure, perhaps based upon

¹James McCarthy, "Opportunities for Strengthening Security in Central and Eastern Europe," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol 59 (15 November 1992) 66.

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two U.S. divisions, perhaps "bob-tailed", is probably about the right force level. U.S. policy should encourage the development of a "European Pillar" within the NATO alliance, possibly using the Western European Union as the core of such a body. The continued emergence of other multi-national European institutions, such as the CSCE and the NACC should also be encouraged, insofar as they contribute to and complement the attainment of NATO goals and objectives. The U.S. should continue to provide a "nuclear umbrella" for the alliance, complemented by British and French strategic nuclear capabilities. The principle emphasis should, however, be placed upon the maintenance of sufficient conventional capability within the Alliance to deter potential crises or, failing that, to cope with them militarily either within the confines of NATO boundaries or "out of sector."

BACKGROUND

NATO was established after World War II when the actions of Stalin's Soviet Union convinced Western Europe nations that they had defeated one threat to their survival only to face another. Britain and France signed the Treaty of Dunkirk in 1947. The Brussels Treaty Organization (BTO) was formed in 1948 when these two countries were joined by Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. This pact was unique in its proposed duration and in the degree to which the signatory nations surrendered their sovereignty. The agreement was to last fifty years, and required any member to respond militarily to an attack on any other member.²

In 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed by twelve nations: The

² Michael J. Collins, Western European Integration, 37.

United States, Canada, France, Italy, Britain, Portugal, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Iceland. Based on the concept pioneered in Brussels that an attack on one member would prompt a response from all, this treaty was a response to Soviet actions of the previous two years. In 1947, Stalin created the Cominform, which was a direct threat to the stability of Western European Governments. Stalin took control of Czechoslovakia by coup d'etat in February 1948, followed in June by his blockade of Berlin. He demanded that Norway sign a treaty similar to the one which he had forced upon Finland, changing their mutual border and guaranteeing Soviet access to Finnish ports. Greece, Turkey, and West Germany all joined NATO by 1955, and Spain became a member in 1982. For more than forty years, NATO has stood as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism.

Christmas day 1991 saw the occurrence of an event the shock of which still reverberates through the corridors of NATO — the Soviet flag was lowered for the last time from atop the Kremlin, to be replaced by the red and blue flag of Imperial Russia. Thus ended the nuclear stalemate which had bound the U.S. and the Soviet Union for nearly forty years. Soviet Secretary General Michael Gorbachov resigned, declaring "We live in a new world...The Cold War has ended, the arms race has stopped, as has the insane militarization that mutilated our economy, public psyche, and morals. The threat of world war has been removed."³ Gorbachov had done what Georgi Arbatov, the director of the Soviet institute responsible for studying the U.S. and Canada, had promised when he stated, "We are going to do something terrible to you.

³Mary H.Cooper, "NATO's Changing Role," CO Researcher , Vol 2 (21 August 1992) 715.

We are going to deprive you of an enemy.”⁴

Arbatov was right. With the traditional nemesis to the East gone, the NATO nations began a fervent quest for the holy grail of the “peace dividend.” For Europeans, the demise of the Soviet Union offered the hope of demilitarization of their territories; to the U.S., it offered the prospect of defense savings which could be used to address burgeoning domestic problems.

The euphoria was short-lived. Ethnic, religious, and national rivalries, long suppressed by the domination of Soviet military power, exploded. The governments of the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia were destabilized by fighting. Frictions between the Czechs and Slovaks resurfaced and eventually led to the country’s partition. Worst of all, Yugoslavia degenerated into a bloodbath which admits of no ready solution and which has many potential consequences—all bad—ranging from mass immigration of refugees to the West to regional warfare involving one (or more) NATO allies.

The Alliance, whose origins were rooted in a monolithic threat, has a dilemma. “The NATO allies no longer have a common adversary in the old sense,” observes David Calleo, director of European Studies at SAIS. “It was a great incentive to alliance unity, having the Russian army in the middle of Germany.”⁵ On both sides of the Atlantic, policy makers are grappling with the questions of what their national interests are, whether there is a continuing role for NATO, and, if so, how the alliance should adapt to the new geopolitical landscape.

⁴Talbott Strobe, “No More Mr. Tough Guy?” Time (23 May 1988) 25.

⁵Cooper, 716.

U.S. INTERESTS

U.S. security interests in post-cold war Europe will not be dictated primarily by such traditional external factors as geographical location, access to resources and markets, or the influences of outside powers, according to Francois Heisbourg. No longer required to focus its resources against a heavily armed, hegemonic USSR, the United States will be motivated to a greater extent by domestic considerations—economic, societal, and political. Traditional U.S. interests are changing. Concerns such as ensuring the security of citizens while protecting their interests abroad and helping other democratic states preserve their way of life will increasingly be joined by “Whatever will contribute to the revitalization of the U.S. productive base broadly defined — for example, improvements in education, infrastructure, and research and development — will be more readily deemed to be in the national interest than was the case....” Conflicts which would have, in the past, presented opportunities for Soviet exploitation and thereby demand U.S. involvement will no longer be accorded such priority. On the other hand, “...issues that have a basic bearing on the functioning of an international system in which (the U.S.) cannot fail to have a major economic or political stake...” will continue to impact on U.S. vital interests.⁶ Events in the Persian Gulf, Northeast Asia, and Europe will therefore continue to be of great importance. The general proliferation of nuclear weapons, or the loss of control of such weapons in the former Soviet Union will also continue to be particularly significant. Post Cold-War Europe is no longer,

⁶Francois Heisbourg, “The Future of the Atlantic Alliance: Whither NATO, whether NATO?” The Washington Quarterly (Spring 1992) 125.

however, the setting of a confrontation which caused the U.S. to consider every crisis a potential threat to its vital interests, thereby justifying a continued forward deployment of massive armed forces.

Even though the military conditions which called for a U.S. presence no longer exist, however, such a presence has not become superfluous. Indeed, R. James Woolsey, a Washington attorney who was the U.S. Ambassador and negotiator for the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty cautions that it is in the interest of the United States to maintain a substantial military presence on the continent

...to keep the European continent from going haywire again. The history of the continent is such that someone has tried to dominate it six times over the last four centuries. Europe is sufficiently important and sufficiently closely tied to American security that we have three times in the 20th Century had to intervene massively in order to keep that from happening.⁷

Heisbourg concurs, pointing out the "...convergence between the logic of history (better to be in Europe than to have to get there the hard way) and of geography (risks to U.S. interest in the Middle East as well as Europe can be countered from Europe).⁸

POTENTIAL THREATS AND CONTINGENCIES

What are the future challenges for NATO? A 1992 study by Rand points out the complexity of this question, stating that "...the former Soviet Union is but one element of the future security environment that

⁷Cooper, 717.

⁸Heisbourg, 148.

need to be considered.”⁹ A part of the mandate of the study was to propose contingencies which represented the full range of the type of threats to European security which could arise in the future. Significantly, global conflict with the former Soviet Union is not considered likely. That being said, however, the findings of the study suggest that the range of challenges NATO may be called upon to face will be broader and more diverse than it was in the Cold War era. Rand developed eighteen contingencies, which were grouped into five categories. These briefly listed and described here, along with insights on their implications for NATO.

Peacetime Competition with NATO

The Warsaw pact has disintegrated, and the Soviet Union has imploded. The rapid pace of these events and the attendant “noise level” make it easy to overlook the fact that the residual nuclear threat is little short of awesome. A Rand analysis points out that under the provisions of the START treaty, “Russia will still still deploy some 1600 strategic delivery systems and 6000 warheads, plus a large force of medium bombers.”¹⁰ The subsequent agreement between Presidents Bush and Yeltsin to eliminate MIRVed missiles will, if followed through, reduce this posture, but Russia will still retain the ability to inflict tremendous devastation upon heavily urbanized and densely populated Western Europe.

While the most dangerous scenario is for a Russian nuclear strike against Germany or Western Europe, this is not the most likely scenario.

⁹Rechar L. Kugler, NATO Military Strategy for the Post-Cold War Era—Issues and Options (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1992) 71.

¹⁰Kugler, 75.

A more worrisome possibility is that the Russia would use its nuclear potential to influence peacetime diplomacy and to enhance its leverage in times of crisis. Such "Finlandization" could lead West European nations to accede to unfavorable demands by a resurgent Russia and otherwise yield to nuclear blackmail.

This contingency highlights the need for NATO to retain a nuclear capability which is strong, survivable, and credible. Germany and the other non-nuclear capable nations of Western Europe would be particularly vulnerable to coercion of this type. Whether Britain or France would extend their own deterrent capability to provide coverage for the rest of Europe is unclear, and the value of such a deterrent is questionable due to the relatively small size and vulnerability of each nation's nuclear force.

It is also possible that Russia will, at some point, determine that sustained peacetime military competition with the West is in its best interests. The Rand study points to the "ebbing and flowing" of Soviet military efforts as the government's perception of its situation and priorities changed. Kugler cites a "...pendulum-like history..." of shifting emphasis on conventional and nuclear capability and observes that "...Yeltsin's present policies may not be the final stage in Russian military preparedness."¹¹ The Washington Post comments that Yeltsin's "...power and authority appeared to be seeping away in recent weeks..." and that "...the conservative parliament, has made clear that, given free rein, it would challenge the sweep of Russia's new foreign policy partnership with the United States on issues including arms control, arms

¹¹ Kugler, 76.

sales..." and others.¹²

Treaties and agreements currently in effect, along with continuing economic problems, make further reductions in Russia's nuclear and conventional military capabilities a virtual certainty. Future developments may, however, enable Russia to resume its military competition with the West, either by force modernization or expansion. This possibility highlights a significant reason for retaining NATO as an integrated coalition, to give the West a capability to reconstitute its own forces should the need arise. NATO's institutions and alliance relationships provide a solid defense industrial base, as well as the political ability to respond in a centralized, organized manner, should such an eventuality occur.

NATO-Russian War Involving Attacks on NATO's Borders

Although seemingly unlikely, the possibility of war between NATO and Russia is one that NATO planners will continue to consider, especially as long as the outcome of the competition between the forces of liberalism and conservatism in Russia is in doubt. The Rand study posits two scenarios which could result in such a conflict:

- Reaction to increasingly close ties between Western European nations and former Warsaw Pact countries. This could lead to fear and resentment, and ultimately to "premeditated aggression."
- Expansion of a localized crisis, such as the ongoing conflict in Yugoslavia, into a generalized war.¹³

¹²Fred Hiatt, "'Crisis of Power' Threatening Yeltsin's Rule" The Washington Post, 21 Feb 93, A25.

¹³Kugler, 77.

Although such a conflict would probably be preceded by a period of deteriorating relations between Russia and the Western Nation(s) involved, the Rand study cautions that such advanced warning would not necessarily translate into reaction time for NATO. The alliance might hesitate to take any action which could be construed as provocative, or might fail to act as a result of uncertainty regarding Russian intentions. The nature and capabilities of NATO's "forces in being" will have a major impact on the alliance's ability to deter such a war. A strategy based upon the regeneration of military capability to meet an emerging threat could tempt Russian adventurism; a strong NATO defense posture will serve to dissuade a Russian government from considering or attempting aggression against the West.

The Rand work goes on to briefly develop possible scenarios for such actions by the Russians, ranging from air/missile or naval attacks against Germany or Turkey designed to intimidate or compel them into a particular policy direction, to ground attacks against those nations to achieve some territorial objective (such as regaining control over the former East Germany). Rand assesses these scenarios as being militarily feasible, based on projections of post-CFE Russian capabilities. Regarding the political likelihood of such conflicts, Kugler states that "...the art of forecasting the political basis for any specific war...is a scarcely believable enterprise..." and that "...both scenarios must be classified as 'hard to imagine...'" they cannot be considered "...out of the question. Much depends upon the future atmosphere in Europe, which is impossible to gauge from today's vantage point."¹⁴ Anatoly Sobchak, Mayor of

¹⁴Kugler, 79.

St. Petersburg, observes that from a Russian standpoint Germany is at the top of the list of "three new destabilizing threats (which) will define the geopolitical landscape in the 21st Century," followed by the Islamic member states of the former Soviet Union "...that will unify with the Islamic world to their south..."¹⁵ of which Turkey is a part, and China.

Russian Reentry into Eastern Europe

This contingency is based upon the assumption that although Russia may pose little threat to Western Europe for the foreseeable future, NATO and Russia will have conflicting interests rooted in the affairs of Eastern Europe. Envisioned are conflicts which would pose no direct threat to the West, but would involve aggression against former Soviet satellite states. The question is whether this "highly plausible state of affairs" would affect western interests sufficiently to prompt military action. The Rand study hypothesizes that such action could take place either in the Baltics or against Russia's Eastern European neighbors, and would probably stop short of overrunning these nations entirely (thus threatening NATO borders) to avoid provoking a response. Such a strategy would pose a profound dilemma for NATO.¹⁶

During the Cold War, Western reaction to similar combinations of aggression and restraint during Soviet invasions was restrained, comprising vehement diplomatic protests and imposed sanctions. Fear of confrontation would still be a factor, but changes will have occurred which could make it difficult for the West to remain aloof. Among these changes are far closer economic, political, and social ties with Eastern

¹⁵Anatoly Sobchak, "The Non-U.S. Perspective: Three Views," New Perspectives Quarterly Vol 9 (Summer 1992) 25.

¹⁶Kugler, 81.

Europe; the presumed legitimacy of Eastern governments, probably democratic, which would be likely to call for help; and informal (or formal) membership in the Western community, with EC and, possibly, NATO ties. These factors, along with increased Russian vulnerability to military and economic sanctions, would make the calculus of response far different from that extant during the days of Soviet military preeminence. The Rand assessment is that the success of such a NATO enterprise is hard to predict, but that the risk of escalation to a much larger conflict is not.¹⁷

Another worrisome possibility is the risk of Western entanglement and escalation in a civil war between member nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that could spill over into Eastern Europe as a result of ethnic fighting and rebellions in Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia, and/or Moldova. Ethnic associations which run across Commonwealth borders could produce mass migrations leading Russian forces to violate the sovereignty of its neighbors. The West could be forced to choose between helping Russia restore order or helping resist its invasion of a sovereign nation. Particularly thorny is the prospect of conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which are already experiencing tensions resulting from debate over the division of the military residue of the Soviet Armed Forces. A conventional war would "...affect European stability in ways that would be difficult for NATO to ignore."¹⁸ The fact that there are still nuclear forces on Ukrainian soil makes the prospect far more problematic. Kugler observes that these situations "illustrate the complex problems of crisis management that may lie

¹⁷Kugler, 82.

¹⁸Kugler, 83.

ahead for NATO and the West.”¹⁹

Eastern European/Balkan Crises

The Rand study poses these contingencies as those in which Russia would not be an aggressor, but which rather would involve East European nations, particularly in the Balkans. Although not putting Russian and Western forces in direct political or military opposition, conflicts of this sort would present crisis management problems for NATO far beyond the local issues involved. As an example, Kugler presents the possibility of a Bulgarian-Turkish conflict which would embroil Greece, then evolve into “...a classic Balkan imbroglio, one driven by deep ethnic emotions as well as conflicting strategic goals.”²⁰ Other possibilities are conflicts between Romania and Hungary over Transylvania, as well as the ongoing carnage in Yugoslavia. These conflicts have in common their origins in the complicated ethnic, economic and political affairs of Eastern Europe — and their suppression during the Cold War.

It might be argued that conflicts of this sort would not affect the vital security interests of Western European nations. Citing the recent involvement in Yugoslavia, the Rand study proposes that, because of the Balkans’ history of chronic instability which tends to involve the whole of Europe, many NATO nations would choose to intervene “on the side of crisis control and democratic governments.”²¹ This sort of role is new and unique for NATO forces. To limit the potential for escalation of the kind that led to World War I, the West would have to master the handling of crises of this nature.

¹⁹Kugler, 83.

²⁰Kugler, 84.

²¹Kugler, 84.

Crises Involving Radical Arab Powers

Past difficulties with Iran and Libya, as well as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, may be the precursors of a period of prolonged difficulties in the relations between Western European nations and Islamic fundamentalism. The conflict between these cultures, which are, in many ways, diametrically opposed, presents the possibility of numerous and varied security challenges. To address these contingencies, NATO will be forced to broaden its focus to include Southwest Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean or Southern Region. The Rand analysis presents a span of possibilities for NATO involvement. These include: terrorism and harassment of Western interests such as that which provoked the El Dorado Canyon operation against Libya; threats to Western access to resources (oil) such as that which resulted in Operation Desert Storm/Shield; attack of a radical Arab power on Turkey; missile attacks on Southern European cities along the Mediterranean coast; and an Arab attack on Israel.^{2 2} Possible NATO responses could include clandestine strike operations, extensive multinational military responses in the Persian Gulf or Middle East, or massive logistical support operations over long distances. These operations, which may be the "wave of the future," were not part of the NATO repertoire a few years ago.

Kugler, contrasting the efforts of moderate Arab nations to maintain harmonious relations with the West and the radical agendas of Iran, Iraq, and Libya, states that "Whether the forces of moderation or Islamic fervor will triumph remains to be seen."^{2 3} He further observes

^{2 2}Kugler, 85.

^{2 3}Kugler, 85.

that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region could be tremendously destabilizing, and that the greatest danger is the possibility that Saudi Arabia and Egypt will fall victim to internal revolutions and adopt confrontational policies. The outcome is contingent upon the successful conclusion of the peace process in such a way that the increasing tensions between the prosperous West and the impoverished radical Arab powers are reduced or eliminated. The outcome is not predictable. NATO will, therefore, have to plan for contingencies of this type for the foreseeable future.

U.S. POLICY OPTIONS

What should U.S. policy toward the future of NATO be? Based upon the existing and potential challenges to stability and security in Europe, some sort of security apparatus is essential. While there are other organizations in Europe (the WEU, CSCE, and NACC, for example) none of them offer now or in the near future the possibility of acting to provide credible security. NATO's chief advantage is that it does what it is supposed to do, and does it well. Far more than just a military alliance in the historical sense, NATO has evolved into "...a kind of international legislature..." which "...functions very well despite the fact that all major decisions take full sixteen nation agreement."²⁴ It is clear that the U.S. should, therefore, strongly support the continued existence of the Alliance.

Should the U.S. remain a part of NATO? In addition to the direct contribution to U.S. security that the presence of a credible force in Europe provides, the simple fact is that the Europeans have expressed

²⁴Collins, 39.

great anxiety at the prospect of a complete withdrawal of American forces. Chancellor Kohl has stated that "It is imperative that the U.S., mindful of the lessons from history this century, continues to play its central role in matters of European security."²⁵ The International Herald Tribune recently stated that "As long as the European Community is unable to build a political and military entity to match the power of Russia, there is an absolute need for some American military presence on the continent."²⁶ British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd cautioned: "It would be deeply foolish to let or encourage the Americans to go home, as foolish as it was in the 1920s when Adolf Hitler was simply an insignificant adventurer in this city of Munich."²⁷ The Russian view, according to the Mayor of St. Petersburg, is that "...instability in Russia could cause destabilization and, no doubt one day, war. For this reason, Russia needs America's presence as a stabilizing external force."²⁸

What about a "European Pillar"? Originally conceived by President John F. Kennedy in 1962,²⁹ this concept has been resisted for years by U.S. policy makers as a threat to American influence in European security matters. If this was ever true, it is no longer. The Western European Union, originally formed in 1955 but virtually inactive for many years, has recently begun to re-emerge as an influential body in European security circles and as a significant complement to NATO. It was the WEU which served as the mechanism for the coordination of Euro-

²⁵Edward Mortimer and Quentin Peel, "Aspin Confirms Commitment to NATO: Plans for US Troop Cuts Do Not Mean Sidelining Europe," The Financial Times, (8 February 1992) 2.

²⁶Francois de Rose, "A U.S.-French Key to a NATO Future," The International Herald Tribune (17 February 1992) 4.

²⁷Mortimer and Peel, 6.

²⁸Sobchak, 25.

²⁹Heisbourg, 149.

pean contributions to the Persian Gulf War. The WEU offers an avenue for meaningful (and essential) participation by the French in security policy decisions until such time that their national sensibilities will allow them to rejoin NATO (if ever). The WEU as a "European Pillar" offers the prospect of significant economies of scale and elimination of redundant capabilities through coordination of weapons production among the European allies, which, like the U.S., will face budgetary constraints on defense for the foreseeable future. The WEU also offers the possibility (however distant) of a venue in which European nations could resolve purely European issues which, for various reasons, do not require U.S. involvement. That the WEU is unlikely to compete with NATO is indicated by recent developments:

- The WEU headquarters was recently moved to Brussels to permit closer coordination with NATO headquarters.
- Several nations have "dual-hatted" their NATO representatives to also represent them in the WEU.
- The Maasterich Treaty of 1991 which identifies the WEU as the EC's defense body requires WEU cooperation with NATO.

What size U.S. force should remain forward deployed in Europe?

Ambassador Woolsey comments:

I think we can do it at lower troop levels than we now have, perhaps even slightly lower than the (Bush) administration has suggested with NATO's reorganization, but I think you have to have something over there that you could with a straight face call several brigades' worth of troops, plus a few air wings, in order to be a serious and major component in the security arrangements of

Europe.³⁰

By U.S. doctrine, the smallest organization which can effectively employ, train, and sustain such a force for an extended time is a Corps, comprising at least two maneuver divisions, and commanded by a Lieutenant General. By nature, this is a flexible organization, designed to facilitate structural changes. The specific components of the Corps could be tailored to meet strength limitations. In addition, the rank of the commander is not an inconsequential consideration. In the rank conscious milieu of European military circles, a "mere" Division Commander (Major General) could not secure a meaningful place "at the table."

Nuclear or non-nuclear? The rationale for a forward deployed nuclear presence has already been described. The potential for nuclear blackmail by a resurgent Russia is real. Heisbourg adds, "Robust nuclear deterrence — and none is more robust than the U.S. variety — may prove to be useful as proliferation of nuclear weapons raises new challenges in various parts of the former USSR and middle east. In place deterrence, close to the troubled areas, is best."³¹

Should the U.S. support the designation of a European Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) as a sign of the Europeanization of security in NATO? The short answer is "NO!" As long as the U.S. provides a "nuclear umbrella" for Europe, control of that deterrent should remain under U.S. command. In addition, "A SACEUR of U.S. origin is one of the clearest, most effective ways of signaling the indivisibility of the U.S.-European security compact, particularly at a time when there are

³⁰Cooper, 717.

³¹Heisbourg, 148.

doubts as to the future of the U.S. commitment, and directly contributes to strategic coupling. If Europeanization is to occur, and be recognized, it will happen in the European organizations.”^{3 2}

Conclusion

It is in the best interests of the United States to actively support NATO and to work to adapt its institutions to the rapid changes occurring in the geostrategic landscape. European and American security are inextricably linked, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Europe and North America share geostrategic interests that are enduring; balancing the power of a potentially hostile Russia on the Eurasian landmass, preventing the spread of conflict initiated by ethnic or nationalistic tensions, and securing access to the resources of the Middle East. Equally important are the fundamental political, cultural, and economic ties that bind members of the North Atlantic Alliance. NATO, with the active participation and leadership of the United States, is essential to the preserving that security, insuring the viability of those interests, and maintaining those links.

^{3 2}Heisbourg, 149.